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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 000009

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PINR ASEC SNAR GT
SUBJECT: EX-SECURITY CHIEF QUINTANILLA TURNS HIMSELF IN

REF: A. GUATEMALA 1131
1B. GUATEMALA 1171

Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Drew Blakeney for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

¶1. (C) Controversial ex-Director of Presidential Security Carlos Quintanilla, a longtime friend and campaign financier of President Alvaro Colom, turned himself in to authorities December 22. Now under house arrest and prohibited from leaving the country, Quintanilla faces charges of negligence, interception of communications, and espionage. (The negligence and espionage charges carry possible prison sentences of 1-3 years and 6 months-2 years respectively.) Prosecutor Rony Lopez publicly stated that the charges stem from Quintanilla's alleged failure to stop the bugging of the President's offices. President Colom had publicly denounced and displayed evidence of the bugging of his offices September 4 (ref a); Quintanilla became a fugitive from justice on September 6 (ref b). According to military intelligence sources, Quintanilla spent most of the intervening three and a half months at his ranch near Taxisco, Santa Rosa Department.

¶2. (U) Quintanilla publicly said that the bugging incident had been a ruse perpetrated by someone who wanted his job, and that he remained loyal to President Colom. In keeping with his consistent message that this is a judicial matter, President Colom did not publicly comment on Quintanilla's reappearance. Former Director of the Secretariat of Strategic Analysis Gustavo Solano, who was charged at the same time as Quintanilla, still remains at large (ref b).

¶3. (C) As requested by President Colom, the FBI analyzed the microphones allegedly recovered from the presidential offices, although the chain of evidence previously had been compromised. All but possibly one were battery-operated, requiring replacement of the battery every twelve hours. The device that allegedly was connected to President Colom's telephone had two clipped wires, indicating that it may have been attached to an electrical source. All of the devices were commercially available; there was no indication that they originated from a foreign government. During an interview with an FBI agent, the Ministry of Government official who claimed to have found the bugs was unable to point to the precise locations where he had found them, and said no photographs had been taken. He could not name the equipment he had used to conduct the sweep, and said he had never conducted a sweep prior to the one that allegedly revealed the bugs.

¶4. (C) Comment: President Colom had previously made clear to the Ambassador that he had wanted to rid himself of Quintanilla, who had acquired too much influence over the state's rule of law institutions (ref b). This latest development appears to be the opening of the final chapter in

Quintanilla's removal from public life. We think it unlikely that he will serve a prison sentence. More likely is that the malleable Guatemalan judiciary will only impose fines, and that Quintanilla will then largely disappear from public view.

McFarland